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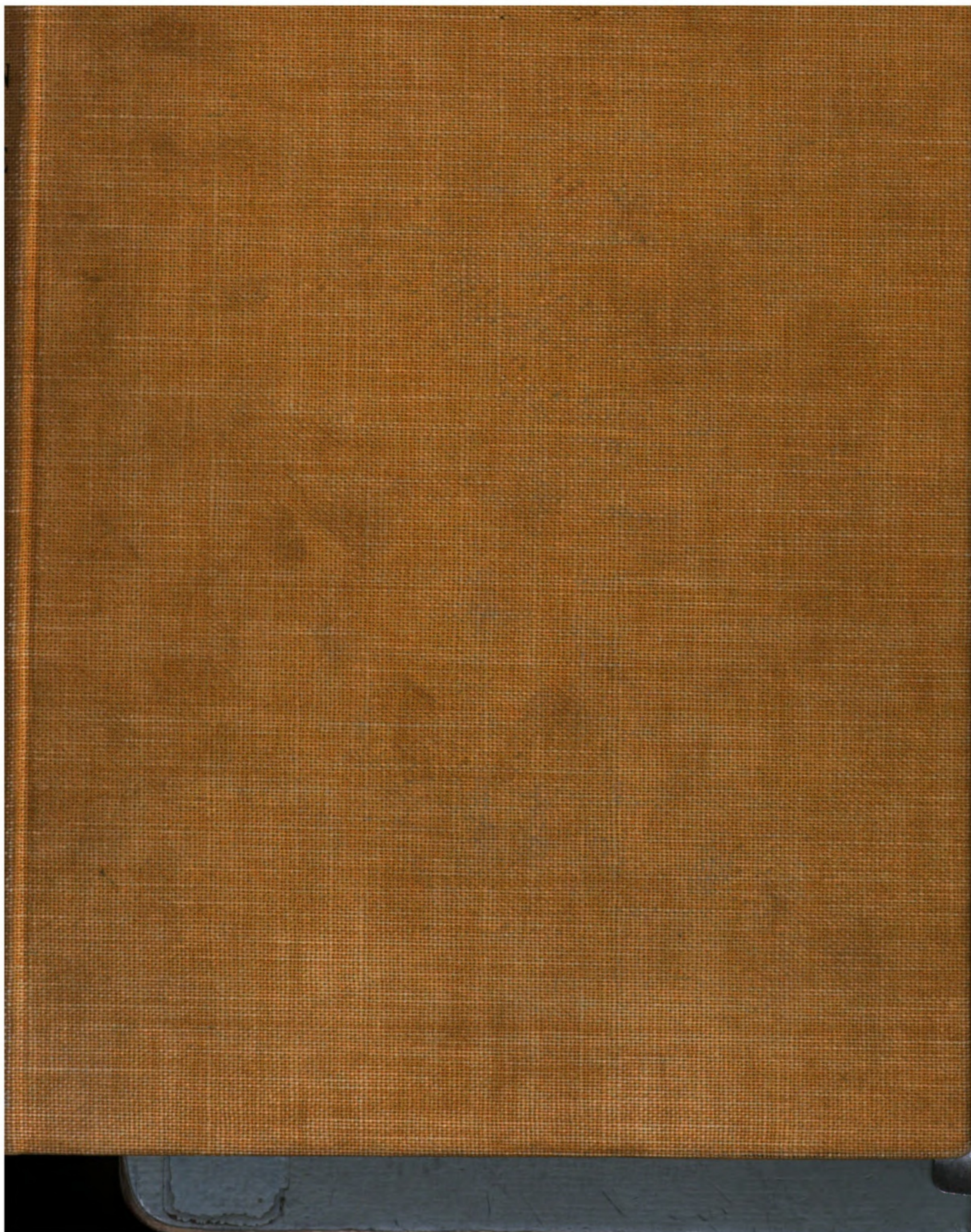
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AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE



OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

UCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Translated from the Original Old French by
DULCIE LAWRENCE SMITH, and *Illustrations by*
EILEEN LAWRENCE SMITH

*. . . and sleep did so overtake her that she slept on
into the morrow . . .*

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... and sleep had so overtaken her that she slept on
into the morning ...

A TWELFTH-CENTURY ROMANCE

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Translated from the Original Old French by
DULCIE LAWRENCE SMITH, *with Illus-*
trations by EILEEN LAWRENCE SMITH



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FOREWORD

THOSE who are already familiar with the story of "Aucassin and Nicolette" may be surprised to find a part of the original tale missing in this translation. I have left out the whole account of the adventures in Torelore, because they have seemed to me the only blot on an otherwise perfect little romance. And in thinking them foolish and incongruous, I find that I am in good company, for such an able critic as M. Gaston Paris considers: "tout l'épisode des aventures lointaines des deux amants ennuyeux autant qu'absurde." It is only a matter of a few paragraphs omitted, and those who feel that the tale is not complete without them, can supply them either from the original old French or from other translations.

D. L. S.

'Tis of Aucassin and of Nicolete

WHO now will listen and hear tell,
In right good verse and fairly set,
Of that distress and grief that fell
To Aucassin and Nicolete ?
Of their misfortunes and the load
Of wrong that these two children bare,
And all the prowess that he showed
For her whose countenance was fair ?
Sweet is the song and rare the tale
And courteous and well-contrived ;
There is no man that hath such ail,
Of soundness or of joy deprived,
Nor stricken of such malady,
But he shall straightway mended be,
So brave the story.

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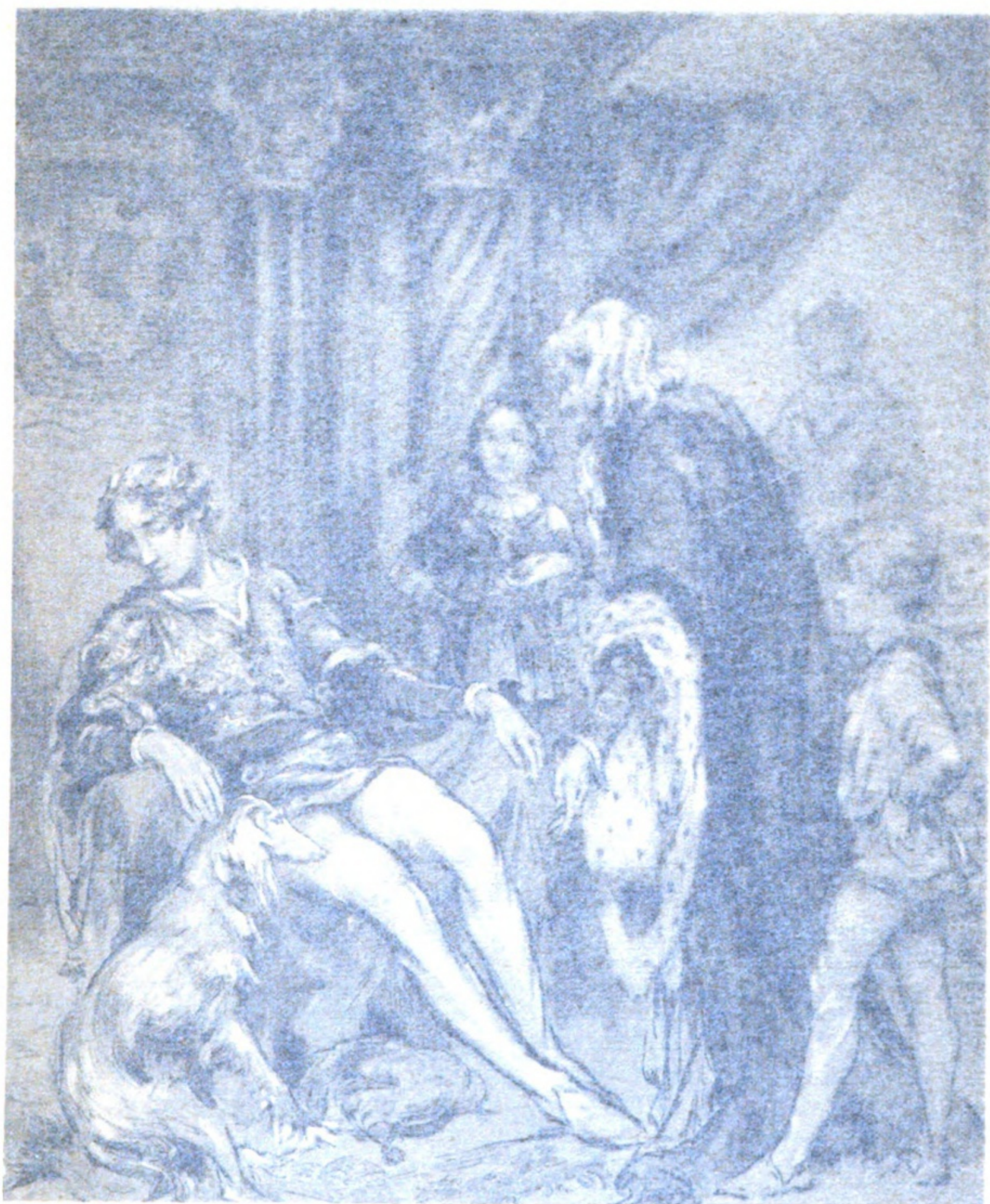
Now they say and tell and relate :

THAT the count Bougars of Valence did make war upon the count Garin of Beaucaire, so great and so marvellous and so mortal, that never dawned there a single day when there were not a hundred knights and ten thousand men-at-arms before the gates, and the walls, and the barriers of the town ; and they set fire to his land, and laid bare his country, and slew his citizens.

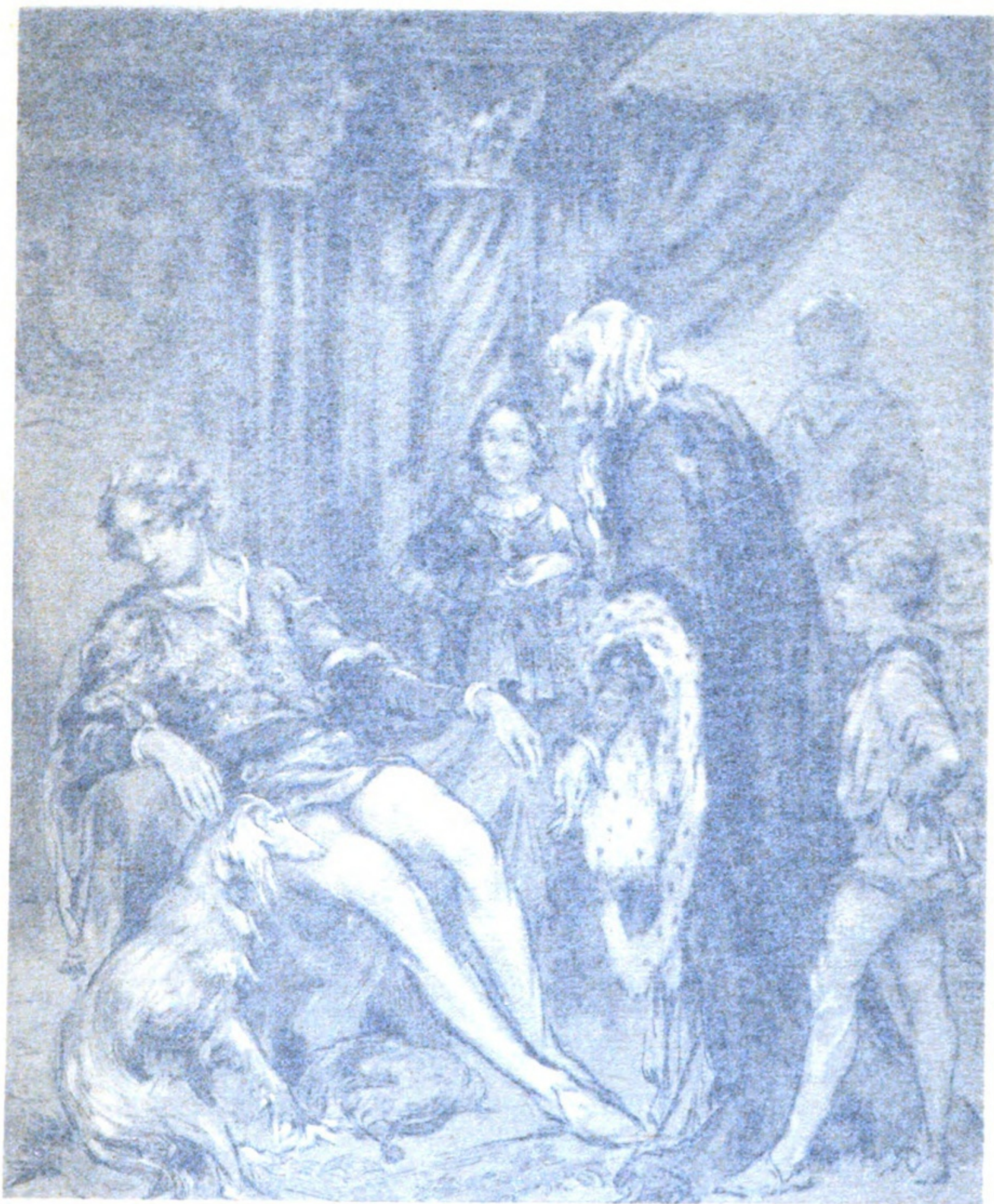
The count Garin was old and feeble and had lived his time. He had no heirs save one son only, and he was such as I will tell you. Aucassin was the youth called ; fair was he and comely and tall, and well-fashioned of limb and of foot and of body. His hair was blond and curling in little curls, and his eyes were bright and had laughter ; frank was he and fine of countenance, the nose high and well-set, and he was endowed of such good qualities that in him was nothing evil at all, but only good.

But he was surprised of love that overcometh

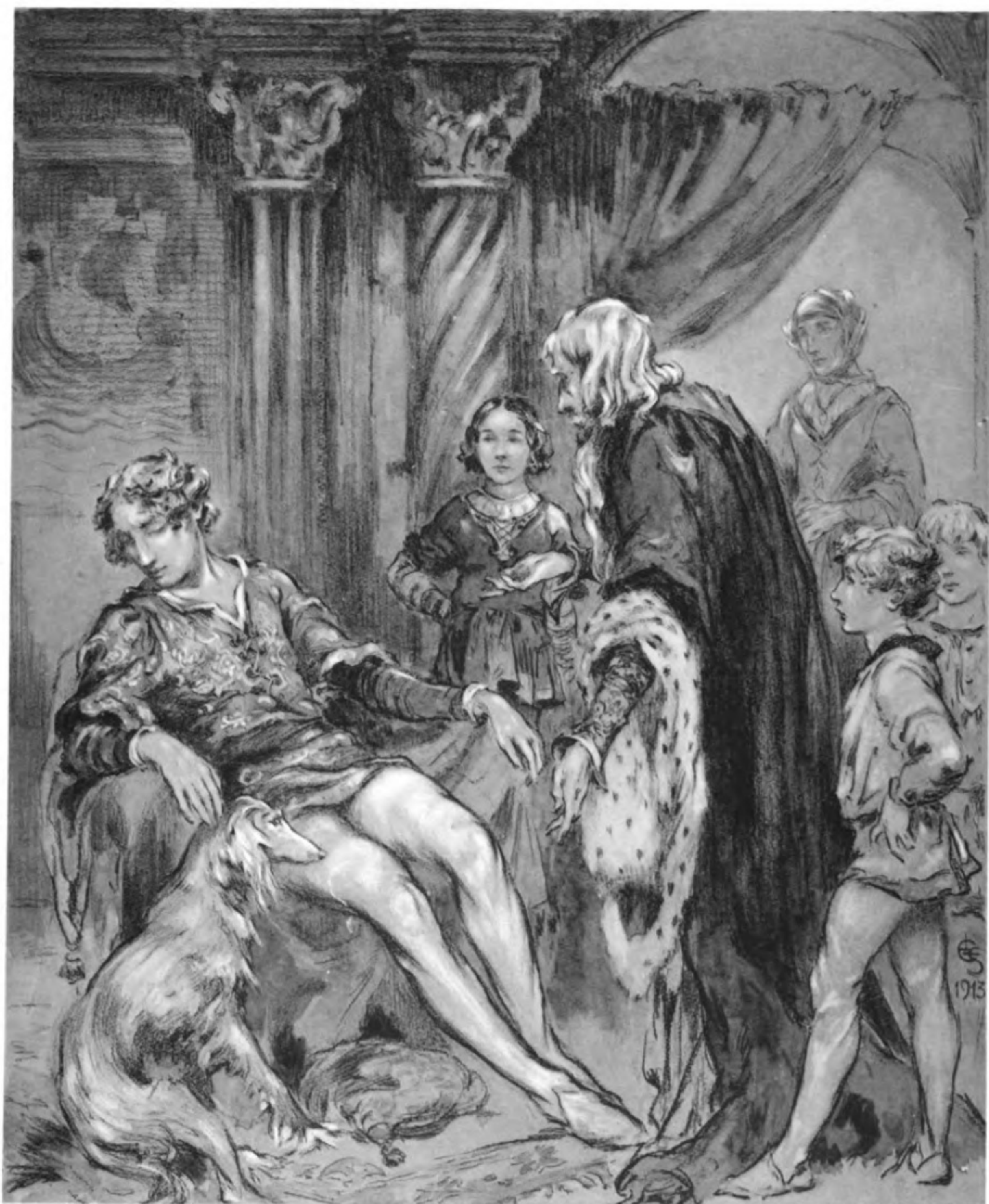
“Therefore take thy mind from Nicolette . . .”



"Therefore take thy mind from Nicolette . . ."



Deinde, "minutis . . ."



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all, so much that he desired not to become knight, nor to take up arms, nor tourney, nor to do anything that he should. His father and his mother said to him :

“Son, take up thy arms and mount horse, and prithee defend thy country and help thy men. If they do but see thee in the midst of them they will the better defend themselves and their goods, and thy land and mine.”

—“Father,” said Aucassin, “what talk is this ? May God never grant me anything that I ask of Him, if ever I become knight or mount horse or go into combat or battle where I may lay hand on knights and they on me, except you give me Nicolete, my sweet love that I love so well.”

—“Son,” said his father, “it may not be. Therefore take thy mind from Nicolete ; for she is a captive that was brought from a strange land, and the Sheriff of the town did buy her from the Saracens and brought her to this place, and hath cherished and baptised her, and made her his

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daughter ; and one day he will give her a husband who shall win bread for her with honour. With her hast thou nought to do, but if thou hast desire for a wife, I will give thee the daughter of a king or of a count. There is no man so rich in France, but that if you desire his daughter you shall have her."

—"Oh, my father," said Aucassin, "where is there such high honour in France, but that Nicolete, my very sweet love, would not be well placed in it ? If she were empress of Constantinople or of Germany, or queen of France or of England, it would be little indeed for her, so noble is she, and courteous, and debonair, and full of all excellent virtues."

And they sing :

AUCASSIN was of Beaucaire,
Son to the lord of it and heir,
His heart from Nicolete, the fair,
No man could sever.
Ne'er would his father give consent,

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His mother made much argument
And chided ever :
“ Marry, fool ! be counselled, pray.
Nicolete is bright and gay,
Came from Carthage on a day
And Pagans bought her.
If thou takest wife to thee,
Prithee seek of thy degree
Some great man’s daughter.”
—“ Mother, have I choice or care ?
For Nicolete is debonair ;
Her fashion and her lively air
And her beauty,
Her sweetness are my heart’s delight,
To love her were but just and right
And more than duty.”

Then they say and tell and relate :

WHEN the count Garin of Beaucaire saw that
he could not turn Aucassin, his son, from
the love of Nicolete, he betook himself to the

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Sheriff of the town, who was his liegeman, and spake with him.

“Sir Sheriff,” quoth he, “I pray you take away Nicolete, your daughter. And a curse on the country whence they brought her hither! For because of her is Aucassin lost to me, for he will not become knight nor do anything that he should. And know, that if I can lay hands on her, she shall burn in fire, and you also may have much fear for yourself.”

—“Sir,” said the Sheriff, “’tis against my will that he comes and goes and hath speech with her. Of mine own monies was she bought, and I have cherished and baptised her, and made her my daughter, and one day will I give her a husband who shall win bread for her with honour. With her hath Aucassin, your son, nought to do. But since it is your desire and your pleasure, I will send her away into such a land and such a kingdom that never more shall she be seen of his eyes.”

—“Look to it then,” said the count Garin.
“Or great ill may you have of it.”

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And they went their ways.

Now the Sheriff was a very rich man and had a fair castle within a garden. And he caused Nicolette to be put into a chamber very high up, and an old dame with her for fellowship and for company, and he had bread set there and meat and wine and whatever she had need of. Then he caused the door to be sealed, so that it was not possible anywhere to enter or to go out, except that there was a small window towards the garden through which a little fresh air came in to her.

And they sing :

THEY took the maiden, Nicolete,
Put her in a place apart,
A vaulted chamber that was set
High up and dight with wondrous art.
And she at her small casement saw
Over the garden and beyond.
Straight were her brows, her hair was blond,
More comeliness that hath no flaw,

*And she at her small casement saw
Over the garden and beyond.*



*And then, at her mother's command, she
went to the garden and beyond.*



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And more enchanting, none have spied.

She saw them in the garden—all
The full-blown roses, loose and wide,
Saw the birds and heard them call,

And she cried :

“ Ah me, for pity ! Captive I !

Prithee wherefore do I lie

Here in thrall ?

Aucassin, my liege, my lord,
We have loved, and still—God wot—

Still I think you hate me not ;

Marry, is this our reward

For loving ? By the Virgin's Son,

Captive will I be of none,

If I can loose me.”

Then they say and tell and relate :

NICOLETE was in prison, as you have heard
and been told, in that high chamber. The
noise and the outcry of it went abroad in all the
country, that Nicolette was lost. Some said that she

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was fled out of the kingdom, and some that the count Garin had let slay her. Now whoever had joy of it, Aucassin had none, and he betook himself to the Sheriff of the town and spake with him :

“Sir Sheriff,” said he, “what have you done with Nicolete, my very sweet love, that I loved more than all the world ? Have you stolen her or filched her from me ? Know, that if I die of it, vengeance shall be demanded of you, and most justly, for you have slain me with your two hands, in that you have taken away her whom I loved better than all the world.”

—“Fair sir,” said the Sheriff, “of your grace, let be. Nicolete is a captive that I brought from a strange land. I did buy her of the Saracens, and have cherished and baptised her, and made her my daughter, and one day I will give her a husband who shall win bread for her with honour. With her have you nought to do, but take you the daughter of a king or of a count to wife.

“Moreover, what think you to profit in taking her

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for your mistress ? Little gain will you have of it, for your body shall be dishonoured during many days, and afterwards your soul shall be in hell. And into paradise shall you not pass."

—"What should I do in paradise ? I will not seek to enter, except I have Nicolete, my very sweet love that I love so well. For into paradise go none but these folk that I will tell you. Thither go the old priests, and the lame, and the crippled, that kneel all day and all night before their altars and in their ancient crypts ; that wear old mantles and are clad in old rags ; that are naked and without shoes or hosen ; that die of hunger and of thirst and of cold and of all discomforts. Such go into paradise, and with these have I nought to do.

"But into hell would I go ; for thither goes the sage and the nobleman, and the good soldier, and the knight who died in tourney or in the great wars. With these would I be. And thither go the fair ladies and courteous, that had two lovers

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or three besides their lords ; and thither goes all the silver and the gold and the rich furs, and the harpers, and the minstrels, and the kings of the world. With these would I be, but not except I have Nicolete, my very sweet love."

—" Certes," said the Sheriff, " you speak to no purpose, for you will never see her more. And if you talk, and your father should know of it, he will burn me with her in one fire, and you also may have great fear for yourself."

—" It grieves me much," said Aucassin. And he went away sorrowing.

And they sing :

SO he turned and went from there
In sorrow and in much despair ;
Of her whose countenance was fair
None could give him tiding ;
Climbed up to a room apart
To conceal an aching heart,
And keep his grief in hiding.

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Here with his tears alone,
Made he great dole and moan.
“ Nicolete, full of grace,
Sweet to see, to embrace,
Sweet for laughter and for sporting,
Sweet for kissing and for courting ;
For thy sake so plagued am I,
I think I should have joy to die,
Sweet love—my sister.”

Then they say and tell and relate :

MEANWHILE that Aucassin was in a chamber apart, mourning for Nicolete, his love, the count Bougars of Valence, who had that war to finish, trifled not at all, but summoned his men on foot and on horse, and went to the assaulting of the castle. The uproar arose and the noise of it, and knight and man-at-arms did gird himself, and sought the gates and the walls of the castle to defend them ; and the citizens mounted to the fortifications and shot down stones and pointed darts.

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And while the assault was at its height, came the count Garin of Beaucaire to that chamber where Aucassin made lament and mourned for Nicolette, his very sweet love that he loved so well.

“Ha, son,” said he, “how pitiful art thou and of a poor spirit, for thou seest them attack thy castle with all their might and stoutly! And know, that if thou lose it, I will disinherit thee. Then take thy arms, son, and mount horse, and defend thy country and help thy men, and go out to battle. Even if thou lay not hand on knight nor they on thee, if thy people do but see thee among them, they will the better defend themselves and their goods, and thy land and mine. Tall art thou and strong, and well mayest do that, that is thy devoir.”

—“Father,” said Aucassin, “what talk is this? Now may God never grant me anything that I ask of Him, if ever I become knight, or mount horse, or go into combat or battle, except you give me Nicolette, my sweet love that I love so well.”

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—"Son," said his father, "it may not be. Rather would I suffer to lose all that I have than that thou shouldst take her to wife."

He made to go away, and Aucassin saw him go, and called after him.

"Father," said Aucassin, "come, I will make good covenant with you."

—"What covenant, fair son?"

—"I will take arms and go into battle on condition of thy oath, that if I come back safe and whole, thou lettest me see Nicolete, my sweet love, that I may have two words of her or three, and kiss her once."

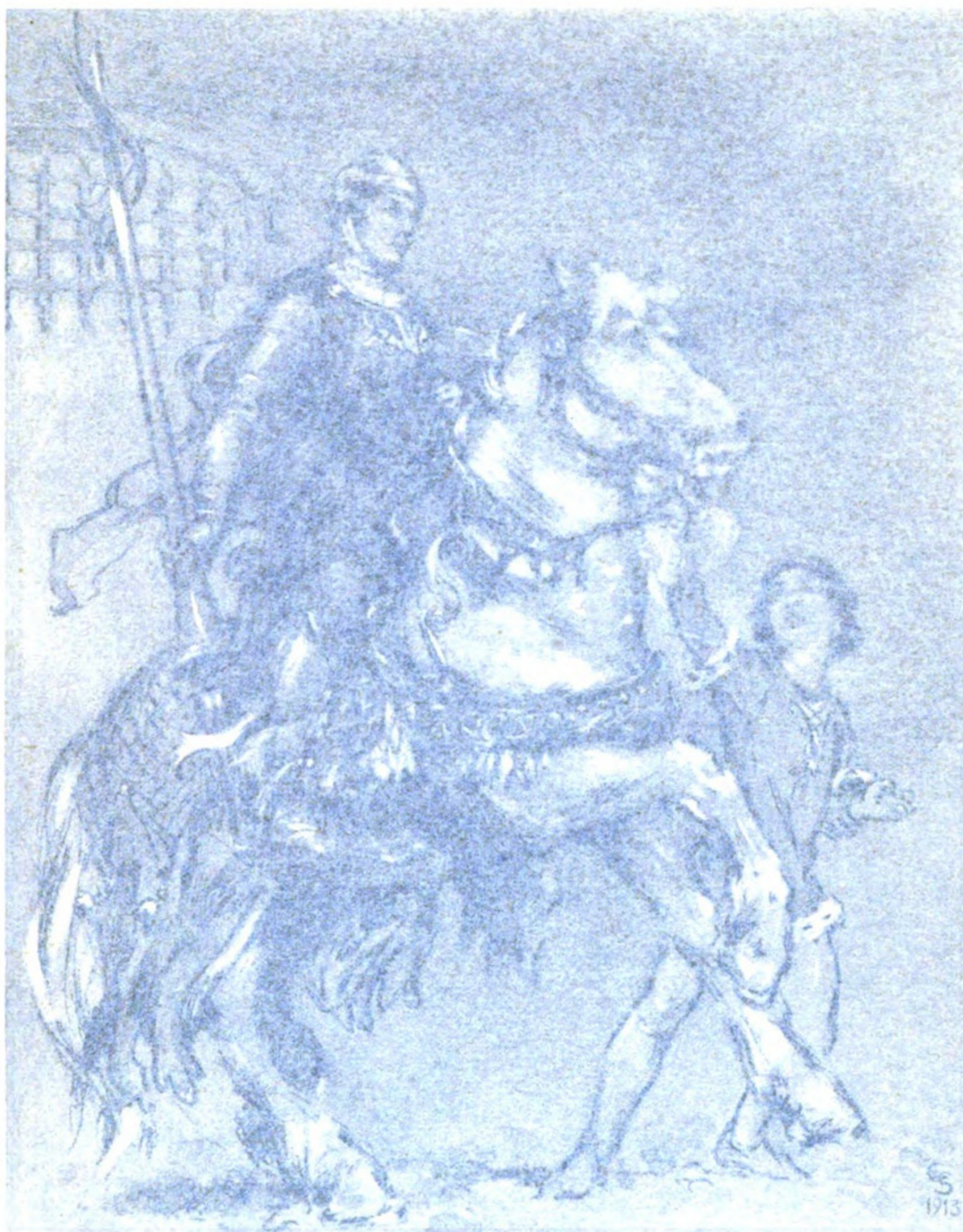
—"I will grant it," said the count.

He made oath; and Aucassin was glad.

And they sing:

AND now, when Aucassin was told
That he should have that envied kiss,
An hundred thousand marks of gold
Would not have given him such bliss.

*The sleek, tall horse that he bestrode,
I trow it was not loth to go,
Full bravely through the gate he rode,
A-thinking on his love, and so
Passed out to battle.*



Dark, not here that he been do,
now it seems not both to go,
all he really through the gate here do,
that taking on the love, and a
I used to be a child.



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Then to his pages : " Straightway get
My arms, the costliest," he said,
Donned the double hauberk, set
Helm of steel upon his head.
His sword's gold hilt was finely chased ;
He mounted, shield took he and lance ;
That each foot should be rightly placed
And firm, to each he gave a glance.
The sleek, tall horse that he bestrode,
I trow it was not loth to go,
Full bravely through the gate he rode,
A-thinking on his love, and so
Passed out to battle.

Then they say and tell and relate :

A UCASSIN was armed and upon his horse, as you
have heard and been told. God ! how bravely
sat the shield on his shoulder, and the helm upon
his head, and the baldrick of his sword upon his
left thigh ! Tall was he and strong and hand-
some and right valiant, and the horse whereon

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he sat was swift and mettlesome, and the youth rode him right well through the gateway. Now think not that he considered of the taking of oxen or of cattle or of goats, nor of how he might lay hand on knight and they on him. Nenni, not at all! Never was he minded of that, but thought so much on Nicolete, his sweet love, that he forgot his reins and all that he should do. And when his destrere felt the spur, it carried him into the press, into the very midst of his enemies, and they laid hands on him from every side to take him prisoner, and spoiled him of his shield and of his lance; and having taken him all suddenly and by surprise, they fell to disputing by what death he should die.

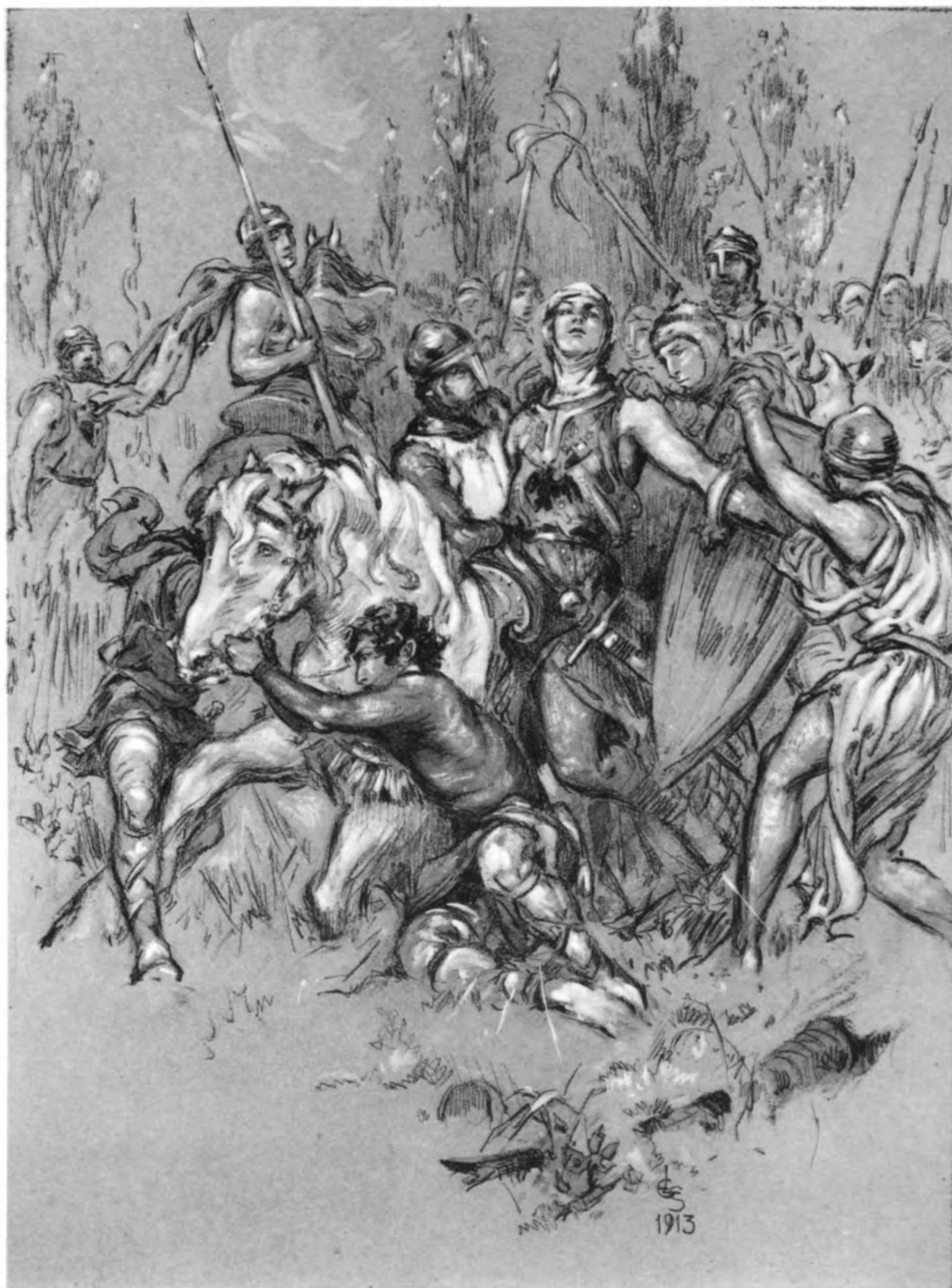
And when Aucassin heard :

“Ha, God!” quoth he, “sweet Saviour! Are not these my mortal enemies that have taken me and will cut off my head without more ado? And when my head is off, no more may I speak with Nicolete, my sweet love that I love so well. Be-

*. . . and they laid hands on him from every side to
take him prisoner.*



and the first of the series in the form of a file in
the first place.



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hold I have yet a good sword, and bestride a good horse that is now breathed. Now if I defend not myself for her sake, may God never help me more, nor she love me ! ”

The youth was tall and strong, and the horse whereon he sat was mettlesome, as you have heard. And he set hand to sword and began to lay about him right and left, and smote helm and nasal and fist and arm, and made a slaughter about him like the slaughter of the deer that the dogs assail in the forest. He slew ten knights, and seven he wounded sore, and he flung himself all unforeseen out of the press and came back a-gallop and sword in hand.

Now the count Bougars of Valence had heard tell that they would hang Aucassin, his enemy, and he came to that place and was known of Aucassin. The youth held his sword in his hand, and smote the count about the helm so sore, that it was crushed upon his head. So amazed was he that he fell to the ground, and Aucassin put forth his

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hand and took him by the nasal of the helmet, and so brought him captive to his father.

“Father,” said Aucassin, “see here your enemy, that hath made war on you this long time and done you such grievous harm. Twenty years hath this war endured, because no man could end it.”

—“Fair son,” said his father, “such deeds of prowess should you do, nor dream more follies.”

—“Father,” quoth Aucassin, “set not about to give me sermons, but prithee keep covenant with me.”

—“Bah ! what covenant, fair son ? ”

—“Oh, my father, have you no mind of it ? Now by my head, whoever hath forgotten it, I have not, but hold it much to heart. Did you not make covenant when I took arms and went into battle, that if God by his grace restore me safe and whole, you would let me see Nicolete, my sweet love, that I might have two words of her or three,

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and kiss her once ? Truly this vow you made to me, and truly you shall keep it, say I ! ”

—“ Now God help me not,” said his father, “ if ever I keep such covenant with you. If she were now at hand, I would burn her in a fire, and you also might have much fear for yourself.”

—“ And is this all ? ” said Aucassin.

—“ God help me,” said the count, “ it is.”

—“ Certes,” quoth Aucassin, “ it grieves me much to hear a man lie that hath thy years. Count of Valence,” said he, “ I did take you prisoner.”

—“ Sir, truly,” said he of Valence.

—“ Give me your hand,” said Aucassin.

—“ Right willingly, sir.”

And he laid his hand in the other’s.

“ Pledge me this,” said Aucassin, “ that while you live, if there be a day when you may do my father shame or injury, to his person or to his goods, at no time will you neglect to do it.”

—“ Sir, for God’s pity,” said he, “ mock me not, but put me to ransom. For you can ask neither

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

gold nor silver, horse nor palfrey, hound nor bird,
grey furs nor dappled, that I will not give you."

—"How now," said Aucassin, "are you not my
prisoner?"

—"Sir, of a truth," said the other.

—"God help me not," cried Aucassin, "if your
head fly not from your shoulders, except you
pledge me this."

—"In God's name," said the count Bougars,
"I will pledge you anything you please."

He took oath, and Aucassin made him mount
a horse, and took horse himself and escorted him
into safety.

And they sing :

THEN the count Garin in despair
Resolved, since Aucassin, his son,
From her whose countenance was fair
Would not be turned of anyone,
To set his stubbornness in chains,
And to the cold grey underground

*And to the cold grey underground
Came Aucassin . . .*



*in old paper and
writing . . .*



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Came Aucassin, to suffer pains
More sharp than ever he had found.
Great mourning made he, very drear
And sorrowful, as you shall hear.
“ My fair white lily, Nicolete,
My sweet love of the gracious mien,
Than all white lilies fairer yet,
More sweet than ever Love hath seen !
I saw a poor man on a day
From Limousin, a poor pilgrim,
And stricken on his bed he lay
With some disease that wasted him ;
Sore vexed of that disease and nigh
To death, I ween. And you came by.
You passed his litter, and you took
In either hand your robe and train,
Caught up your smock, that he might look
On that white limb, and live again.
He looked, the pilgrim, and he saw,
He saw, and straightway healed was he,
Nor lay in sickness any more,

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

But journeyed to his own country.

Nicolete, flower of grace

Sweet to see, to embrace,

Sweet for laughter and for sporting,

Sweet for kissing and for courting.

Can mortal man refrain

From loving thee ? Yet vain

Is it to love ; for I,

I too have loved, and lie

Waiting my time to die

For thee, sweet sister."

Then they say and tell and relate :

AUCASSIN was set in prison, as you have heard
and been told, and Nicolete too was elsewhere in durance.

It was in the summer-time, in the month of May, when days are long and warm and sunny, and nights are still. Nicolete lay one night upon her bed and saw the moon shine clear through a window, and heard the nightingale sing in the

. . . heard the nightingale sing in the garden . . .



... ..



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

garden ; and she bethought her of Aucassin, her love, that she loved so well. She considered the count Garin of Beaucaire, who hated her unto death, and she knew that there where she was she dared not stay. For if she were betrayed, and that to the count Garin, he would cause her to die most monstrously.

And when the crone slept that bore her company, she rose and clad herself in a gown of blue silk that she had, very comely, and took sheets from the bed, and napkins, and knotted them one to another, and made a cord as long as she might ; and she made it fast to the pillars of the window and let herself down. She took up her attire in both hands before and behind, because of the dew that she saw lie heavy on the grass, and so she passed out across the garden.

Her hair was blond and curling in little curls, and her eyes were bright and had laughter ; a fair oval was her face, the nose high and well set, and her lips were red, redder than cherries and

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE.

more red than roses in the summer-time ; her little teeth were white, and the breasts that lifted the folds of her dress were firm, and so slim was she of thigh that your two hands might span ; and the daisies that she touched at her foot's point and that brushed her ankles, were right dark against her feet and her limbs, so white was the damsel.

When she came to the postern-gate, she opened it and passed through into the streets of Beaucaire, seeking the shadow, for the moon shone very clear, and went her way to the tower, where her love was lying. Now the tower was cracked in one place and another, and Nicolette, folded in her mantle, shrank into the shadow of a buttress and passed her head through a crevice in the wall, and heard Aucassin weeping within, weeping and wailing and making lament for his sweet love that he loved so well.

And when she had listened long enough, she spake.

. . . *and so she passed out across the garden.*



and he passed out across the garden.



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

And they sing :

A GAINST a buttress, in its cloak
Of shade, she leaned, and thrilled to hear
A certain Aucassin regret
The fairness of one, Nicolete,
With groans and many a bitter tear
Wrung from his sadness. Then she spoke
And said her say : " Oh, noble knight,
Oh, Aucassin, my dear lord ever,
What profits it to weep and wail,
And prithee what will tears avail,
Or groans, if thou canst have me never,
And never take thy dear delight ?
Certes, thy father hates my sight,
And all thy kinsmen. Love, for thee
I will go hence across the sea,
And journey to a far country."
She spoke, and of her fragrant hair
She cut a lock and cast it in
To him, and it was kissed, and kept
Hid in his bosom. Yet he wept

*Against a buttress, in its cloak
Of shade, she leaned, and thrilled to hear
A certain Aucassin regret
The fairness of one, Nicolette.*





AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Ever, because he could not win
Her, who was fair.

Then they say and tell and relate :

WHEN Aucassin heard Nicolette say that she would fly to another country, then was there no puissance left in him, but to rebuke her.

“Fair sweet love,” said he, “you shall not go at all, or you would have me die of it. For the first man that saw you, if it were possible, he would lay hands on you, and take you to his bed, and make you his mistress. And when that you have lain in any man’s bed, except it be mine, think not that I will tarry to slay myself until I find a knife wherewith to strike my heart. No, of a truth, I will not wait so long ; but where I see a wall or a grey stone, thither will I run, and beat my head against it until mine eyes do fly out, and my brains also. Rather would I die such a death, than know that you had lain in any man’s bed, except it be mine.”

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

—“ Ah,” said she, “ I think you love me not as well as you say, but my love for you is greater than yours for me.”

—“ Oh, fair, sweet friend,” said Aucassin, “ it is not possible that you love me so well as I love you. Woman cannot love man as man loveth woman. For the love of woman is in her eyes, and in the flower of her breast, and in her foot’s point ; but the love of man is set in his heart and cannot pass from thence.”

Meanwhile that Aucassin and Nicolete spoke together, came the guards of the town along the street and had their swords hid under their cloaks. For the count Garin had charged them to slay her, if she could be taken. And the watchman that was upon the tower saw them come, and heard them speak of Nicolete and of how they might slay her.

“ God,” said he, “ it were great pity for so fair a maid, if she were slain. And great service might I do if I could warn her in such wise that they

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

mark me not. For if she be slain, then Aucassin,
my young lord, will die of it, and great shame
would that be."

And they sing :

THE watchman was a valiant man,
And courteous, and wise, and strong ;
Up in his watch-tower he began
A-singing. Listen to his song.
" Oh, faithful heart and bold,
Bright eyes, and hair of gold,
What have I seen ?
One lover came in fear—
(Listen, and hark, and hear !)
One, and the other's near,
Dying, I ween ;
Dying for love of thee,
I say it, hark to me,
Prithee, take care !
Beware the thieves that go,
Seeking thee, to and fro ;

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Under their mantles, lo,
Their swords are bare,
And their hearts dastard, so
Prithee, take care ! ”

Then they say and tell and relate :

“ **A** H,” said Nicolete, “ the soul of thy father
and of thy mother be blessed with peace,
for that you have spoken me so fair and so courte-
ously. If it please God, I will be well delivered
from this, and God deliver me ! ”

Wrapped in her mantle, she hid in the shadow
of that buttress, till they were passed, and then
took she leave of Aucassin and went her way till
she came to the wall of the castle. The wall was
broken and mended, and she climbed upon it and
went on until she was between the wall and the
fosse ; and she looked down and saw that the
fosse was very steep and very far to fall, and she
was much afraid.

“ Oh, God ! ” said she, “ sweet Saviour ! Now

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if I let me down, surely shall I break my neck, and if I stay, to-morrow they will come and take me to burn in a fire. Rather would I die here, that to-morrow all the people may look on me and marvel."

She crossed herself and slipped into the fosse, and when she was come to the bottom of it, her fair feet and her hands, that had not learnt to suffer, were all bruised and torn, and the blood was starting in more than a dozen places; and yet she felt neither pain nor hurt, for the fear that was in her.

And if she was at trouble to get in, still more was she perplexed to come out. But she be-thought her that there it were not wise to tarry, and she found a sharp dart that had been thrown in the defending of the castle, and cut steps there-with one above the other, mounting with great pains until she was come to the top.

Here the forest was distant but by two arrow-fights, and it was well thirty leagues in length and

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in breadth, and there were savage beasts and snake-like that dwelt in it. She was in great fear that they would destroy her, did she go in, but then she bethought her that, if men found her there, they would take and burn her.

And they sing :

WHEN Nicolete, whose face was fair,
Over the fosse to yonder side
Was come, then looked she all abroad,
Calling on Jesus and the Lord.
“ Father, dear God, help my despair,
I know not where to go,” she cried.
“ For if I seek the wood this night,
The wolf, the lion, and the bear,
And all the beasts my limbs will tear
With claws that rend and teeth that bite,—
I dare not seek the wood this night !
And if I tarry till the day,
My foes will come, that do conspire
Against me, and will light a fire,

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A fire to burn my bones away,—
I dare not tarry till the day !
Yet, by the Lord of majesty,
Rather would I deliver me
Into the lion's mouth or the bear's,
Than into Garin of Beaucaire's
Most hostile city ! ”

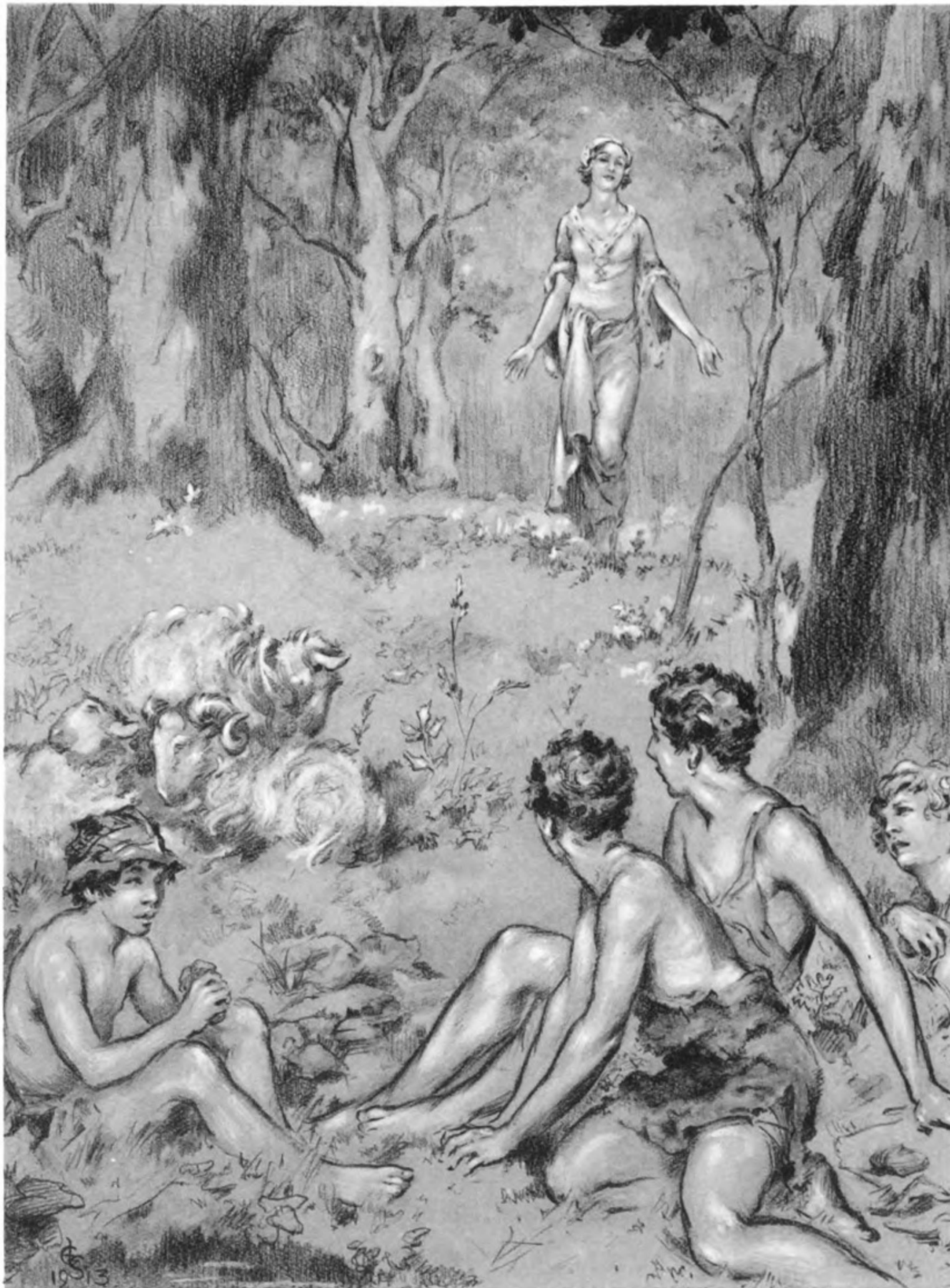
Then they say and tell and relate :

NICOLETE was in much distress, as you have heard. She commended herself to God and went her way until she was come to the forest. Far within she dared not go, because of the savage beasts and snake-like, but hid herself in a thicket ; and sleep did so overtake her that she slept on into the morrow until prime, when the shepherds came out of the town and drove their flocks to pasture between the forest and the river. They went apart to a fair spring that was at the edge of the wood, and spread a cloak upon the ground and set their bread upon it. And while they ate, Nicolette

“Fair children,” said she, “God defend you !”



"I am a child," she said, "and I love you!"



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awoke at the clamour of the birds, and she came upon them.

“Fair children,” said she, “God defend you !”

—“God keep you,” quoth one that had more speech than the rest.

“Fair children,” said she, “know ye Aucassin, son to the count Garin of Beaucaire ?”

—“Aye, surely we know him.”

—“In God’s name,” said she, “tell him that there is a beast in this forest, that he should seek ; and if he can take it, he will not give one limb of it for an hundred gold marks, nor for five hundred, nor yet for any substance.”

And they looked upon her, and she was so fair that they were all amazed.

“And shall I tell him this ?” said he that had more speech than the rest. “Cursed be he that shall ever speak or tell of it ! It is witchery that you have spoken ; for there is no beast in this

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forest—neither stag, nor lion, nor deer—whose one limb is worth more than two deniers or three at the most, and you talk of such great riches! A curse on him that shall believe you, and shall talk of it! You are a witch surely, and we have no joy of your company, so do you take leave of us.”

—“Ah, fair children,” said she, “I do entreat you; for the beast hath such healing that Aucassin will be cured of his malady. I have five sous in my purse; take them and tell him. Three days must he pursue, and if in three days he have not found the beast, never will he see it, nor ever be cured of his malady.”

—“Faith,” said he, “we will take the deniers and if he chance this way we will tell him; but seek him we will not.”

—“In God’s name then,” said she.

And she took leave of the shepherds and went her way.

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

And they sing :

SHE left the swains and went a-stray—
She whose countenance was fair—

Through the forest, in the gay
Summer weather.

All along a grassy way,
Till she stood uncertain, where
Seven roads and seven courses
Met together.

Here she plotted to discover,
By womanly and strange resources,
Peradventure if her lover
Loved her ever.

She took the lily-flowers that grew
Round about her, and she took
Leaf of oak and branch of yew,
Boughs for cover,
And with such cunning as she knew
Made she, in a little nook,
A fair, green arbour. Then vowed she,
By God above her,

*She took the lily-flowers that grew
Round about her, and she took
Leaf of oak and branch of yew,
Boughs for cover . . .*



... to the ...
... and ...
... of ...
... for ...



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

If Aucassin should pass, nor stay
Awhile for her sake, she would be
His fair, sweet love no longer,—nay,
Nor he her lover.

Then they say and tell and relate :

NICOLETE built the lodge, as you have heard and been told, fair and very featly fashioned ; she decked it within and without with leaves and flowers, and set herself in a thicket near at hand, to watch what Aucassin might do.

And the noise and the outcry went abroad that Nicolete was lost. Some said that she was escaped, and some, that the count Garin had let slay her. But whoever had joy of it, Aucassin had little. The count Garin, his father, had him loosed out of prison, and bid the knights of the land and the ladies, and made a very rich feast, and thought therewith to comfort Aucassin, his son. Now when the feast was at its height, Aucassin leaned against a pillar, for whatever joy

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

others might find in this, Aucassin shared it not at all, because the desire of his heart was elsewhere.

And a certain knight that had remarked him, came and spake with him.

"Aucassin," said he, "of that same ailment of thine, I also have ailed. I will give you good counsel, if you be pleased to take it."

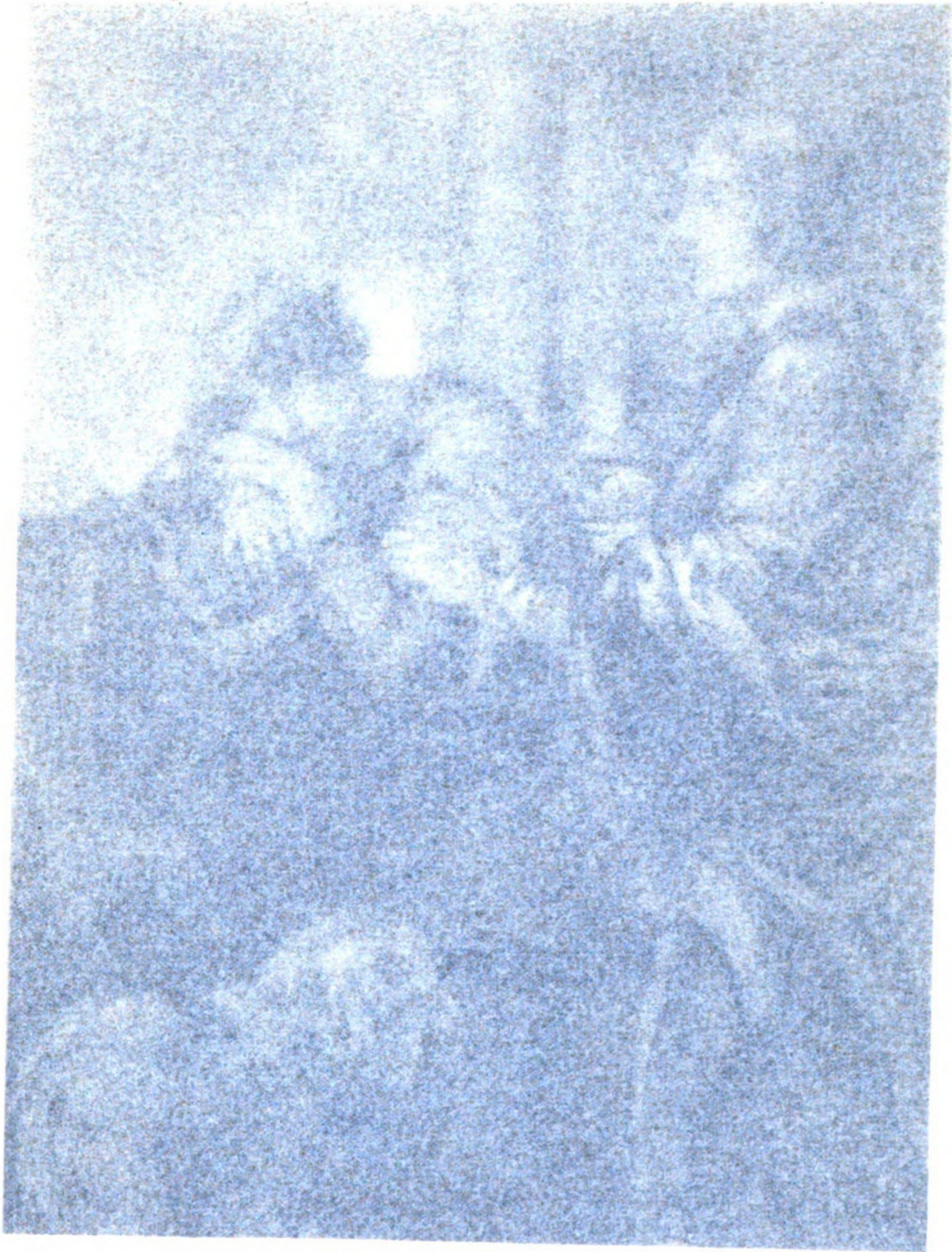
—"Sir," said Aucassin, "grammercy! I am sore in need of good counsel."

—"Then take horse," said he, "and go a-straying in the forest, and see the flowers and the things that grow, and hear the birds sing. Peradventure you may hear that which is more to your mind."

—"Sir," said Aucassin, "grammercy, I will do it."

He fled from the great hall and down the steps, to the stable where his horse was lodged. Saddle and bridle let he put on, and he set foot to the stirrup and mounted and rode away from the castle, till he was come to the forest; and here he

*"Ancassin," said he, "of that same ailment of thine,
I also have ailed. I will give you good counsel . . ."*



"... and," ... the," ... of the ... and ...
... the ... the ... the ... the ...



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

rode at a venture until he came upon the spring and found the shepherds at the point of noon. They had spread a cloak upon the ground, and were eating their bread and making merry.

And they sing :

THE shepherds were together met,
Martin, Aubrey, Esmeret,
Robin, and John, and Fruëlin.
Said one : “ Now God help Aucassin,
My brothers, ne’er was nobler made !
And she, that came out of the glade,
Fair of face and bright of eye,
Who gave us of her pence, to buy
Pasties and meat for many a day,
Knives, and horns, and pipes to play,—
God guard her also.”

Then they say and tell and relate :

WHEN Aucassin heard the shepherds, he minded him of Nicolete, his very sweet love that he loved so well, and bethought him

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that she had been there. He set spurs to his horse and rode towards them.

“Fair children,” said he, “God defend you !”

—“God keep you,” said one that had more speech than the rest.

“Fair children, I pray you sing that song again.”

—“Nenni,” said he that had more speech than the rest. “Cursed be he that should sing it to you, fair sir.”

—“Fair children,” said Aucassin, “know ye not who I am ?”

—“Certes, we know well that you are Aucassin, our young lord ; yet we are not your liegemen, but the count’s.”

—“Fair children, I do beseech you.”

—“Now, in God’s name,” said he, “why should I sing for you, if it please me not ? There is none so rich in this country—except it be the count Garin—that, if he find sheep or goats or cattle of mine astray in his fields, he dare drive them out,

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though he forfeit his eyes for it. And why should I sing for you, if it please me not ? ”

—“ God keep you, fair children, be you pleased to do it. See, here are ten sous in my purse.”

—“ Sir, we will take the deniers, but sing it to you I may not, for I have sworn. Nevertheless if you wish I will say it.”

—“ Now, by God,” said Aucassin, “ rather would I hear it spoken than not at all.”

—“ Sir, a short while ago, between prime and tierce we were here, as we are now, and eating of our bread at this spring, as even now we do. And there came a maid, the fairest in the world—indeed we thought her a fay—and all the wood was brighter for her fairness. And she gave us of her monies, that we should swear to tell you if you came this way, to go hunt in the forest ; for, says she, there hides a beast such that if you could take it you would not give one limb of it for five hundred gold marks, nor yet for any substance. For the beast hath such healing as would cure you

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of your malady ; but you must take it in three days, or not at all. Now pursue if so you will, or if you will, forbear ; for I am well discharged of my message."

—" Fair child," said Aucassin, " you have said enough, and now God help me to find that beast !"

And they sing :

THE words of Nicolete, the fair,
Heard Aucassin, and understood ;
He left the shepherd swains a-stare
And rode into the dark, green wood
All recklessly. His horse was strong
And swift, and as he rode along,
He called her.
" Nicolete, fair of face,
For thy sake am I here,
Yet, marry, I chase
Neither roebuck nor deer,
But follow thy trace
In the forest.

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Thy laughter and grace,
Thy soft voice and clear,
And thine eyes fill this place,
Faith, I know thou art near.
God grant sight of thy face,
Sweet my sister ! ”

Then they say and tell and relate :

AUCASSIN went about the forest in all directions, and his horse bore him at a great pace. Think not that the thorns and the briars made way for him. Nenni, not at all ! They tore his apparel to such good purpose, that scarce was there so much left whole that one might knot together ; and the blood started from his arms and his sides and his legs in twenty places or thirty, so that he might have been traced by the track of his blood upon the earth behind him. But so much thought he on Nicolette, his sweet love, that he felt neither pain nor hurt. And all day long he went about the forest in this wise, and found no sign of her. And

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when he saw that it was near to evening, he began to weep for that he had not found her.

And it happened that he rode along an old grassy way, and looking before him he saw in his path a fellow, such as I will tell you. A great head had he, blacker than charcoal, and had more than a hand's breadth between the eyes, and had huge cheeks and a vast, flat nose, and great spread nostrils, and great thick lips redder than raw meat, and was shod with gaiters and shoon of ox-hide, tied about the knees with willow thongs, and was wrapped in a double cape, and leaned upon a mighty club. Aucassin came upon him all suddenly, and was much afraid at the sight of him.

"Fair brother," said Aucassin, "God defend you!"

—"God protect you," said the other.

—"In God's name, now, what do you here?"

—"What is that to you?" quoth the other.

—"Naught," said Aucassin, "I did ask but for courtesy."

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—"Why do you weep," said the other, "and make such great dole? Certes, if I were so rich a man as you, nothing in the world would make me weep."

—"Do you know me then?" quoth Aucassin.

—"Pardy, I know that you are Aucassin, son to the count; and if you will tell me why you weep, I will tell you what it is that I do here."

—"Certes," said Aucassin, "I will tell you very willingly. This day I came for to hunt in the forest, and saw a white greyhound, the fairest in the world; and I have lost it, and therefore do I weep."

—"Zounds," said the other, "by the heart of our Saviour! Do you weep for a stinking hound? Cursed be he that esteemeth you more, for there is not a rich man in this country, that if your father should ask of him ten or fifteen or twenty such, he would not be willing to give them and that gladly. But I have a call to weep and make dole."

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—“ And wherefore, brother ? ”

—“ Sir, I will tell you. I was serf to a rich man, and drove his plough, and had four oxen. And three days since, there befell me a great mishap, for I lost the best of my oxen, Rouget, the finest of the team, and now I go about seeking him. I have neither eaten nor drunk these three days, and dare not show myself in the town, for they would set me in prison because I have no means to pay. In all the world have I naught of any worth save that which you see upon me. I have a poor mother, who had naught but a mean palliasse, and they took it away from under her, so that she needs must lie upon the straw only. I have more pity for her than for myself, for riches come and go ; what I have lost to-day, to-morrow I gain, and I shall pay for my ox when I can, nor weep for it. But you, you have wept for a filthy hound. Cursed be he that shall esteem you more ! ”

—“ Faith, be of good comfort, fair brother. And God bless thee. What was the worth of thine ox ? ”

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

—"Sir, they have demanded twelve deniers of me, and not one sou can I pay."

—"Come," said Aucassin, "take these twelve deniers of mine, and pay for thine ox."

—"Grammercy, sir," said he, "and God let you find that which you seek!"

They parted, and Aucassin rode away.

The night was fair and still, and he roamed until he was come to where the seven ways met, and saw in front of him the lodge that Nicolette had made, as you have heard; and the lodge was decked with flowers, within and without, and more enchanting it could not be. When Aucassin spied it he stopped; and the light of the moon was upon it.

"Ah, God!" said Aucassin, "here was Nicolette, my sweet love, and this made she of her own fair hands. Now for her sweetness, and for the love that I bear her, I will dismount me and sleep here this night."

He set foot from his horse to dismount, and the

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

horse was great and tall ; and so much thought he on Nicolete, his very sweet love, that he stumbled upon a stone and fell, so heavily that his shoulder was moved out of its place. He knew himself to be much hurt, but he set forth all his strength, and tied his destrere to a thorn-bush, and dragged himself along the ground upon his side until he could lie his length within the lodge. And looking up through a space in the roof he saw the stars of the sky ; and he saw one star more bright than the others, and he cried :

And they sing :

STAR in the night above,
Close to the moon's rim set,
I see my little love
With thee, my Nicolete.
God sought her from afar
To light the evening star,
She, who was fairer far
And brighter yet.

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Dear love, if I could mount
Up to thy most high place,
What would the falling count
If I might kiss thy face ?
King's son or heir were I,
It would not be too high
Honour for thee to grace,
Sweet love, my sister ! ”

Then they say and tell and relate :

WHEN that Nicolette heard Aucassin, she came to him, for she was not far off. She crept into the lodge and threw her arms about his neck, and kissed and clung to him.

“ Fair, sweet love, thou art well found ! ”

—“ And thou, fair sweet love, very well found art thou ! ”

They kissed each other and embraced, and their joy was fair to see.

“ Ah, dear love,” said Aucassin, “ just now was I much hurt about the shoulder, yet now

*Then took she flowers and fresh grass and green leaves,
and tied them upon it . . .*



*When I take the flowers and fruit from the green leaves,
and put them upon the . . .*



AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

I feel neither pain nor distress, since I have thee."

Then she did examine his shoulder, and found that it was set out of its place. And she made such use of her white hands, touching and pulling it, that with the help of God, Who loveth all lovers, it slipped back again. Then took she flowers and fresh grass and green leaves, and tied them upon it with a strip of her smock, and it was quite mended.

"Aucassin," said she, "fair, sweet love, take counsel what you will do. For if your father should let search this forest to-morrow,—I know not what will become of you, but me they will surely slay."

—"Certes, fair, sweet love, I should be much aggrieved, but if I can do aught, they shall not take you."

He mounted his horse and took his love before him, kissing and holding her fast, and so they set forth together.

*Aucassin, the brave, the bold,
Through the forest see him go,
Having all the world to hold
Before him on his saddle-bow.*

When the farmer, the clerk
The student, the soldier, the
man, all the world around
Is in his place, his place, his place



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And they sing :

AUCASSIN, the brave, the bold,
Through the forest see him go,
Having all the world to hold
Before him on his saddle-bow,
Her eyes, her forehead, and her chin,
Her lips, and then her eyes again
He kissed. No kiss sufficed for him.
She reasoned, laughing and in vain.
“To what country shall we go,
Aucassin, my fair, sweet friend ?”
—“Fair, sweet friend, how should I know ?
I care not where our journey end.
Nor care I what the faring be,
If thou hast joy and I have thee.”
They rode by castle, vale, and town,
Mountain, and citadel, and strand,
Till at the coast they lighted down
And stood where sea-foam and sea-sand
Mingle together.

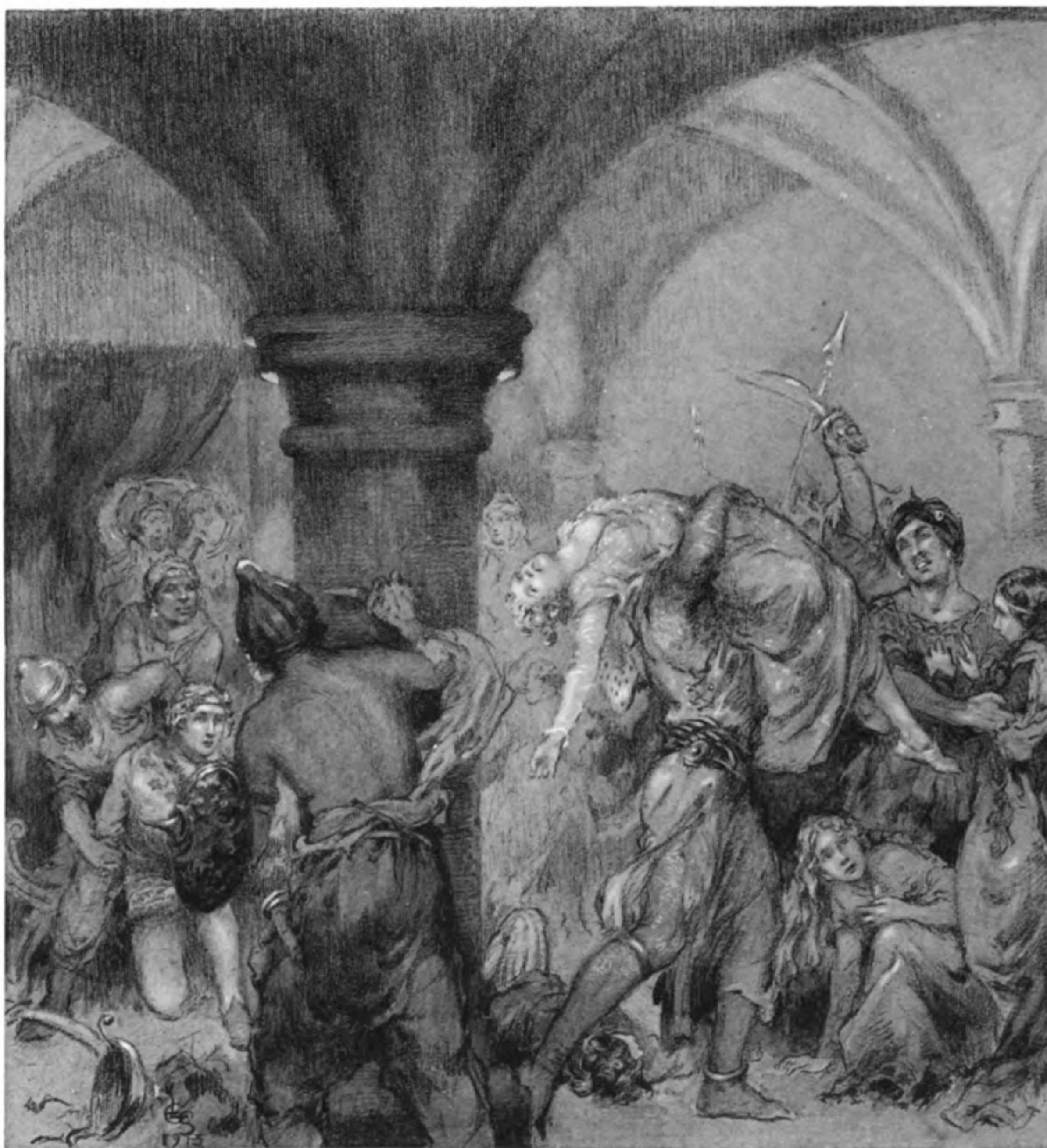
AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE

Then they say and tell and relate :

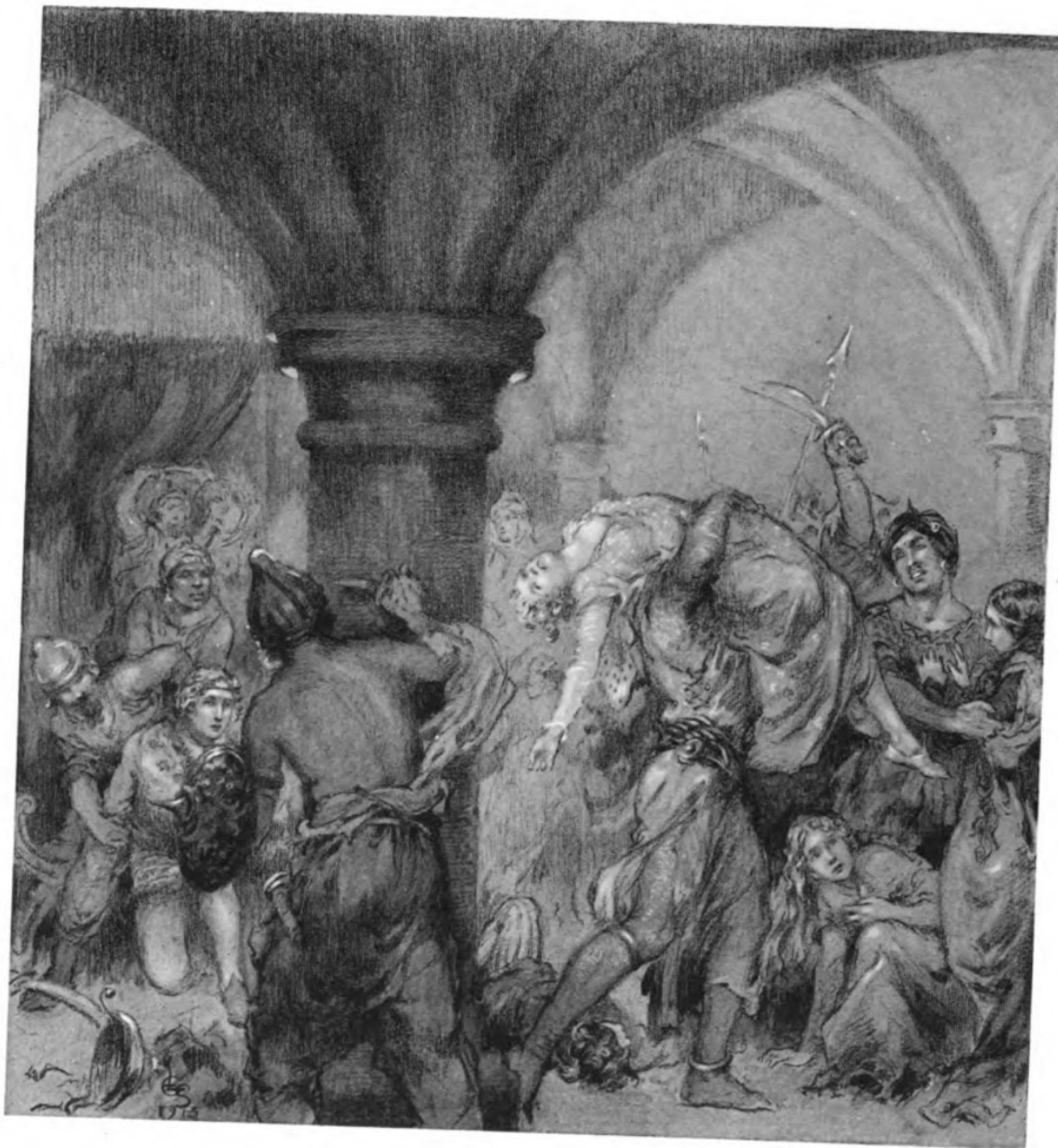
AUCASSIN was dismounted and his love with him, as you have heard and been told. He held his horse by the bridle and his love by the hand, and they went along the shore together. And Aucassin spied a passing ship that sailed near to the coast, that was a merchant vessel. He signed to them, and they drew near and suffered him to come on board. And when they were on the high seas, there arose a great storm and marvellous, that drove them from one land to another, until they came at last to a strange country and sailed into the port of the castle of Torelore. And Aucassin took leave of the merchants and commended them to God. He mounted his horse, his sword girt upon his side, and his love in front of him, and rode to the castle. And the king of the country of Torelore did receive him.

Now Aucassin sojourned in the castle of Torelore at great ease and with much content, for that he had with him Nicolete, his sweet love that he

*. . . there came a fleet of Saracens by sea, and assailed
the castle . . .*



*. . . there came a fleet of Saracens by sea, and I assailed
the castle . . .*



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loved so well. And while he was at such ease, there came a fleet of Saracens by sea, and assailed the castle, and took it by force, pillaging and making prisoners. Nicolete took they, and Aucassin, and him they tied by the hands and by the feet, and cast him into one ship, and Nicolete into another.

And there arose a storm that parted them. The ship wherein was Aucassin went adrift upon the sea, and came to the castle of Beaucaire, and the people of that country, running to plunder it, found Aucassin and knew him. And when they of Beaucaire beheld their young lord, there was great rejoicing made, for Aucassin had been well three years at the castle of Torelore, and his father and mother were dead. They brought him to the castle of Beaucaire and became his liegemen, and he held his land in peace.

And they sing :

AUCASSIN came again
Into his own,
Yet had no joy to reign

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In peace alone ;
For he would lose, he swore,
By God above,
Rather his realm, and more,
Than lose his love.
“ Love, while the rivers flow
Into the sea,
The winds of God do blow
No way I would not go,
Searching for thee.”

Then they say and tell and relate :

NOW leave we Aucassin and tell of Nicolete.
The ship wherein was Nicolete belonged to the king of Carthage, who was her father, and she had twelve brothers, all kings or princes. And when they beheld the fairness of Nicolete, they gave her great honour and made festival for her, and much they sought to discover of her who she might be ; for it seemed to them that she was a very noble lady and of high degree. But indeed

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she knew not who she was, to tell them, for she had been stolen a very little child.

So they sailed until they came to the city of Carthage. And when Nicolette saw the walls of the castle and the country, she minded her that here had she been brought up and from here taken, a very little child. Yet not so little, but that she knew that she was daughter to the king of Carthage and had been brought up in the city.

And they sing :

NICOLETE, the fair, the wise,
Saw the walls before her eyes,
Saw the towers and all the city—
Carthage, whose noble whiteness lies
Looking to seaward ; and she cries :
“ Alack, for pity !
It seems I am of high estate,
Kin to a mighty man and great,
Even the Emir, and the child
Of this same city’s potentate.

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Yet mine own kin to me are wild,
Strange, pagan folk. Oh, my desire,
My gentle knight, Aucassin, sire !
Thy love, that had me in its keeping,
Hath set the heart of me a-fire,
And left me weeping.
God grant me shortly, of His grace,
The rapture of a lost embrace,
To feel thy kisses on my face,
Out of my sleeping."

Then they say and tell and relate :

WHEN the king of Carthage heard Nicolete speak in this wise, he threw his arms about her neck.

"Fair, sweet friend," said he, "tell me who thou art, and be not fearful of me."

—"Sir," said she, "I am daughter to the king of Carthage, and was taken away a very little child, full fifteen years since."

And when they heard her speak, they knew that

*"Fair, sweet friend," said he, "tell me who thou
art, and be not fearful of me."*



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she said truth, and they made a feast and brought her to the palace with much honour, as becomes a king's daughter. And she dwelt there full three years or four, till they would wed her to a rich pagan king, but she had no care to marry. She considered by what means she might go seek Aucassin.

She got her a viol and learned to play upon it, and one night she stole away to the seaport, and lodged with a poor dame on the coast. And she took a herb and anointed her face so that she was all stained and brown; and she let make coat and habit and hosen and shift, and attired herself as a minstrel. Then taking her viol, she sought out a sailor and obtained of him that he should take her in his ship. They set sail and voyaged upon the high seas until they were come to the country of Provence; and here Nicolette left the ship and took her viol and went a-playing about that country, until she came to the castle of Beaucaire, where was Aucassin.

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And they sing :

IN the fair budding of the year,
With baron, knight, and lackey near,
Sat Aucassin, beneath the towers
Of Beaucaire. And he saw the flowers,
Spring-painted, and the birds above.
Then was he minded of his love,
His lady, fair beyond all praise,
That he had loved these many days
And lost ; and very bitterly
He sorrowed that such things should be.
And suddenly before their eyes
Stands one that hath a viol, and cries :
“ Knights of Provence and the South,
From Valence to the river's mouth,
Knights and barons of Beaucaire,
Pleaseth you to hear an air,
Right well set,
Of Aucassin, a noble knight,
Of her that was his dear delight.

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Nicolete ?

Such love had he of his fair,
(Oh, she was blithe and debonair !)
That he would seek her anywhere.
He sought, and what he found he bore
Across the world to Torelore ;
There dwelt they full three years and more,
Till pagans took them both away
Seaward. And none knoweth which way
Went Aucassin,—but she, they say,
Went South to Cartagene, to dwell
With her own sire that loves her well.
And he would give her (so they tell)
A pagan king to wed, but she—
She hath no care for such as he,
And vows, by God his majesty,
Of all men living she will take—
Of all men, marry—
No man, but one, and for his sake
Her heart, they say, is like to break
If long he tarry ! ”

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Then they say and tell and relate :

WHEN Aucassin heard Nicolette speak in this wise, he was right joyful, and he took her aside to question her.

“Fair, sweet friend,” said Aucassin, “know you aught of that same Nicolette of whom you have sung ? ”

—“Of a truth, sir ; I know her, that she is the noblest and the gentlest and the most sage that ever yet was born. And she is daughter to the king of Carthage, who did take her, there where Aucassin also was taken, and brought her to the city of Carthage, in which wise did he discover that she was his own daughter, and did make great joy of her. And day after day he offered her one of the most high kings of all Spain for consort. But rather would she be hanged or burned than take any man, be he never so rich.”

—“Ah, fair, sweet friend,” said the count Aucassin, “if you be pleased to return to that

*. . . took her viol and went a-playing about that
country.*



... took her child and went a-planting about that
country.



. . . took her old and went a-playing about that
country.



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country and say to her, that I would she might come and speak with me, I will give you of my bounty as much as you dare take or demand. Know, that for love of her, I have no wish to take wife, be she never so nobly born, but I wait for her, and never will I wed except it be her. And if I had known where to find her, I should not be still a-seeking."

—"Sir," said she, "if you will do this, I will go seek her, for your sake and for hers, that I love much."

He promised, and bid them give her twenty pounds. And she left him, and he wept for the sweetness of Nicolete. And when she saw him weep :

"Sir," said she, "be not distressed. For in a little while will I bring her to this town and you shall see her."

And when Aucassin heard that, he was right joyful. So she left him, and sought the house of the Sheriff's wife ; for the Sheriff, that was her

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adopted father, was dead. Here she lodged and took counsel with the Sheriff's wife of the matter, and the dame knew her to be that same Nicolete whom she had brought up. And Nicolete, having washed and bathed and rested full eight days, took a herb that was called "esclaire," and anointed herself and was as fair as ever she had been. She clothed herself in rich stuffs that the dame had in plenty, and sat her upon a coverlet of silk, and called the dame and bid her go seek Aucassin, her love. This did she. And when she was come to the palace, she found Aucassin weeping and crying on Nicolete, his love, that she tarried so long. And the dame called to him and said :

"Aucassin, prithee mourn no longer, but come with me, and I will show you that which in all the world you love the most. Even Nicolete, your sweet love, that from very far countries is come to seek you."

And Aucassin was glad.

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And they sing :

NE'ER had he more welcome word,
Aucassin, than when he heard
That she, whose countenance was fair,
Was nigh him, even in Beaucaire.
The dame, she hied her to the gate,
Nor stayed for parley or debate,
And with her Aucassin did go,
And, pardy, but her steps were slow !
Ne'er had she more welcome sight,
Nicolete, nor more delight,
Than seeing him. And straight she ran
To him, whom more than any man
She had desired ; and saw him hold
Two arms towards her, that of old
She knew, and felt upon her brow
Kisses that were not strange, I trow ;
And on her mouth, and hands, and hair,
And on her eyes dear lips that were
Remembered. Then he went away
And left her till the night was day ;

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And they were wedded on the morrow,
For all their days had no more sorrow,
But only joy. Oh, she was fair,
And she was lady of Beaucaire,
And he was Aucassin, the bold.
The song is sung, the tale is told,
Finished the story.



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Aucassin

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